

Love Will Tear Us Apart

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Summary:

A light angst heavy fluff fic about Richie Tozier, Eddie Kaspbrak, and a girl named Virginia who stumble into a very gay love story.

1. Friday I'm In Love

Summary for the Chapter:

1994.

Virginia Clark had just stepped out of the shower, hair still tied up to dry on top of her head, when her mother called her downstairs to answer the phone. She had rushed down the steps with one hand holding the towel around her body in place, already knowing who was calling and why and trying to hide the grimace on her face from her mom. Good news though: She didn't even look her daughter's way as she handed off the pale blue landline to the barely 18 year old, walking off to her room without another word.

"Eddie," Virginia whispered as soon as her mom was out of earshot. "You weren't supposed to be leaving for another hour!"

In the background of the call she heard loud laughter, followed by a soft thud and Eddie sighing through the line. "Yeah, well, Trashmouth has almost snitched on us twice already, and my mom is getting really sick of him." Richie sounded off in the background again, and while she couldn't hear his words she knew he was saying something about how Mrs. K could never get sick of a stud like him. Eddie didn't even pause to listen to him. "We're about to leave in five, okay?"

She looked desperately down at her still-wet body and huffed. She didn't have a choice. "Okay, whatever. That's fine, Eds."

"For the last time, V, don't call me that!"

But she had already hung up, turning and hurrying up the stairs to try to get dressed in the barely 10 minutes she had before the boys (*her boys*, as she called them) to get from Eddie's house to her bedroom window.

She made pretty good time, clipping back her hair to dry and shrugging on an oversized white shirt and pajama shorts before staring into the mirror on her nightstand and trying to put on just

enough mascara and lipgloss that the boys wouldn't notice she did it. She had never thought she was a very pretty girl, but she tried her hardest to make her dark eyes and barely full lips stand out. She was pulling on a pair of socks when a small pebble rapped against her window. Yanking them up to her knees, she hobbled over to the window, quickly brushing her long, brown hair in front of her shoulders. She took a deep breath in her chest, sliding it open and peering down at the boys standing next to the oak tree next to her window. "Hey, losers!" She called down softly, and they both laughed as Eddie grabbed the ladder that was nailed to the trunk.

Virginia's father had built her the treehouse when she was 13, all long legs and freckles, the summer the two boys climbing up and inside it were hanging out in sewers and abandoned houses. Her dad didn't want her out in the streets, so he built the house for her to play in without leaving the neighborhood. Now, five years later, its back window, little more than a square hole in the wall, led to a thick limb that ended right at her bedroom window.

"Stop! Richie, that's not funny, you dumbass!" Eddie half-screamed from inside the treehouse, in response to some torture Virginia hadn't witnessed. "I could have fallen and broken something!"

Slowly, the small boy climbed through the small window, carefully walked a few steps, and eased in through the windowsill. He wore his own set of pajamas: A pale blue t-shirt and long pajama pants with a small squiggly pattern. He smiled at Virginia, and she pulled him into a hug, his head pushing into her chest.

"I missed you, Eddie!" She said as she squeezed his shoulders and he laughed into her shirt.

"I literally saw you three hours ago!"

"I know, but I still missed you."

And she had. Eddie was her best friend in the whole world. They had matching pastel pink friendship bracelets. He had spent almost every weekend at her house since freshman year, and she had even been the first person he told when he decided to come out to his friends last year. She had been so excited to hear it (even if she had

already known for months) that she had bought every teen girl magazine from the store by her house and they had filled out “Does he like you back or is he just a nice guy?” quizzes for hours. They just clicked, and they looked like it too, her baby pink socks contrasting with the light blue green and yellow of his pants as they stood hugging in her bedroom.

“All my music’s on the desk over there. Pick a good one for us, okay, Eds?” She suggested, and he walked over to the corner of the room, thumbing through the cassette tapes stacked in neat piles. Each one in the first three piles was labeled in sloping, loopy cursive, Virginia’s signature penmanship, and Eddie smiled a little at the sight of it.

The first tape in the last pile, though, sported a messier, block lettering. There were small stars drawn in the corners of the label. “A SUMMER SOUNDTRACK BY TRASHMOUTH TOZIER” was scribbled across it. Eddie didn’t notice the corners of his mouth turn down as he picked it up and read the next beneath it - “BEEP BEEP BABY” and the stars were replaced with messy, rushed hearts. He felt his palms begin to sweat. Beneath that: “FRIDAY IM IN (DEEP SHIT)”. Eddie turned back to the piles before, that song by The Cure humming in the back of his head, having heard it a million times around Richie himself.

Virginia sat down on her bed, clasping her hands over her legs and placing her chin on her knees as Richie’s long, lanky legs and arms rusted their way inside the window. She giggled a bit at how ridiculous he looked, and he grinned at her, eyebrows raising at her skinned knees. “Been using those too much, huh, *Virgin*?” He teased, using her least favorite nickname.

She frowned up at him. “If I had, you’d never know,” She answered, bouncing a little in place as the shaggy haired boy threw himself down into her mattress. He was still wearing the same clothes he wore to school that day: a plain white tee underneath some ridiculous Hawaiian shirt with bright pink flamingos on it and dark jeans. He kicked off the same pair of combat boots he had worn for the last two months straight as she turned to Eddie. “You got anything yet?”

“Sure do,” Eddie called back, popping in a tape and sitting beside Virginia on the edge of the bed. Softly, their shared favorite song by Joy Division played through the stereo, and the next few hours all blurred into the soft, fuzzy remembrance of a teenage good night. Eddie laughed when Virginia stole Richie’s glasses and did a *spot-on* impression of him. Richie stood up after four songs and took control of the music duties, which neither V nor Eddie minded, as they could both have listened to his guitar-heavy wistful love songs all night long. Virginia painted her and Eddie’s fingernails, shut up Richie when he started to pick on the smaller boy for the pale pink polish, and even convinced him to let her paint a single nail - his right middle finger. When it was finally 2 in the morning, she yawned, long and hard, which made the other two boys yawn, longer and harder, and everyone agreed it was time for bed. Eddie and Virginia both did their best not to look as Richie stripped down to his boxers and t-shirt, both of their breath hitching in their throats.

For months, when she first started sneaking the boys into her room on Friday nights, Eddie and Richie both would be exiled to the floor, which a single pillow and scratchy blanket each. Then, after a while, Eddie would share a bed with Virginia and Richie would sleep next to them on the floor, sometimes crawling up onto the mattress in the night when he couldn’t sleep. Now, over a year later, they all piled up in her queen sized bed together, a mess of limbs and body heat - Eddie on the far right clutching a pillow to his chest, Virginia in the middle rubbing her soft, cold feet against each other until she drifted off into sleep, and Richie on the far left, farthest from the door, with Virginia’s hair spread across the pillow before him, filling his senses with the smell of coconut and fresh strawberries.

Virginia pretended not to notice Richie’s hands inching underneath her shirt. They never did anything under there, surprisingly, just warmed themselves against her rib cage, and she felt more comforted by them than threatened.

Eddie pretended not to notice Virginia’s soft snoring in his ear or her tendency to wrap her leg around him in her sleep. Instead, he found himself trying to pick out the sound of Richie’s breathing, his lungs labored from the cigarettes he smoked every day now.

Richie pretended not to notice a lot of things, but most of all he

ignored the way Eddie would peek over his shoulder at him every few minutes, big brown eyes catching his and then fluttering away. Virginia never looked back at him, no matter how hard he blew her hair out of his face or pinched the back of her ankles with his toes. She would always just kick him softly with her heels, a silent acknowledgment and discouragement in one.

As they all drifted off into sleep, Eddie realized with his last conscious thought that Richie had put on the “FRIDAY IM IN (DEEP SHIT)” mixtape as that oh-so familiar song by The Cure started on the stereo, just loud enough to hear. Richie’s hand on Virginia’s stomach twitched, and his knuckle brushed Eddie’s back through his thin cotton tee. He pretended not to notice that, too.

2. Stephanie Says

Summary for the Chapter:

1994.

The next morning, as always, Richie woke Virginia up an hour before she wished he would, shaking her side with one hot, slightly sweaty palm. “Wake up, cutie patootie!” He sang in her ear, causing her to blindly slap at his face, knocking his oversized glasses down his nose. He laughed. She turned and buried her face in his chest.

“Five more minutes...” She begged, and he chuckled again at her and blew her hair out of his face with a huff.

“Nope, time to wake up, V! I’ve already waited a half hour at least!”

Which was not true, of course. Virginia knew Richie, almost as well as she knew anyone, and she knew without a doubt that the boy had barely stirred awake himself before he got bored of the still quiet of her bedroom. Only once, on one of the first times he had stayed over, had she been allowed to wake on her own. Her early morning eyes had fluttered open to see Richie thumbing through the cassette tapes on her desk, running his fingers absentmindedly along the pale pink walls, looking inside her closet at old checkered skirts and church dresses, and eventually found him opening her top dresser drawer, where she kept her underwear. She had cleared her throat then, demanding his attention, and he had only peeked over his shoulder innocently at her before launching a pair of soft blue panties at her head. They had hit her forehead and bounced off, landed on Eddie’s sleeping face on the floor beside her. She had frowned while Richie fell to the floor laughing, carefully taking them off of his face and setting them on her bedside table. “You’re an asshole, Richie,” she had mumbled, climbing out of bed and walking over to the window. And that was just what she said and did now, pushing Richie out of

the way as she sat up.

He didn't budge, instead making her climb over him as he snuggled his own head back into the pillow beneath it. "Does Baby wanna roll me a joint?"

"Baby wants you to shut the hell up," she retorted, but made her way over to her closet and pulled out the shoebox she kept her paraphernalia in anyway. If Eddie had been awake, she might have felt more self-conscious about the nickname, but with him fast asleep in her bed, she revelled in the sound of it, smiling to herself as she sat down on the floor and pulled a paper out of the box. It wasn't like Richie was calling her that to be romantic, anyway. He was just playing around and teasing her, as he always was.

When they were younger, Richie and Virginia had shared hundreds of late night calls, sneaking off to their respective kitchens and whispering quiet nothings into the receivers. One night, Richie had told her a big secret: he really, really, really liked Dirty Dancing. Virginia had gotten so excited she could hardly contain herself, giggling for almost an hour about the ridiculousness of a boy like Richie who smoked cigarettes behind the gym in free period and cussed out his History III teacher liked fucking Dirty Dancing! He had let her go on and on, laughing to herself endlessly while quoting the movie, snorting and cackling and sounding like a dying seal, without saying a word. When she finally calmed down, she had one last giggle, the sound of it crackling a little through the phone lines. "I'm kidding, Rich, I love it too! I am Baby, to be real..." And within 24 hours he had given her the "BEEP BEEP BABY" mixtape and for years whenever they were alone he would bring up the old nickname just to watch her eyelids flutter at the sound of it coming from his lips.

While Virginia rolled the j, her eyebrows drawing together in the middle as she concentrated on not wrinkling the paper, Richie turned over on the mattress, looking over at Eddie's still-sleeping frame. He smiled a little, so little Virginia didn't even notice, and reached out to run a finger down the back of his arm. His body shivered under the

covers, skin breaking out in small goosebumps where Richie had touched him, and, while he knew Virginia did keep her room much colder than the Kaspbrak house, something in him told him Eddie's body had reacted that way for other reasons. He ignored that, mad at himself for even thinking that ridiculous shit, sitting up and facing Virginia's spot on the floor.

Her tongue stuck out between her teeth just a bit, as it always did when she focused, and he bit back a chuckle. He didn't want to distract her. She looked up at him as she sealed the joint with one last lick, smoothing her thumbs along the seam after her tongue. "There ya go, garbage boy!" She cheered, tossing it up and onto the bed before him. He rolled his eyes, grabbing it between two fingers.

"Finally!" He teased her again, ignoring her gasp of indignation that followed. "Can we just blow it out the window or do we have to climb out and back in again?" He asked.

Virginia walked over to the window and peered out of it, noticing her mother, father, and sisters' cars all gone. She shrugged. "We can just sit here. No one's home."

Richie sat cross-legged on the floor in front of her while Virginia slipped her bruised, skinned legs out the window. Richie lit the joint with the lighter he kept in his right front jeans pocket, throwing the pants back in the corner after he retrieved what he needed from them. It was quiet for a while, then Richie handed Virginia the spliff and walked over to find a song to play. She sat still, blowing smoke out the window, looking out at the world before her and listening to Eddie's quiet breathing. Richie put on The Smiths. She couldn't hear Eddie's breathing anymore, but she knew it was there, beneath all the strings and drums, keeping its own slow, steady rhythm.

"Stop me, oh oh oh, stop me. Stop me if you think that you've heard this one before..."

Richie sat back down behind her. She passed him the j. Their fingers just barely brushed. Moments later, he would notice the goosebumps broke out on her arms and use them as evidence to disregard Eddie's, not knowing they came from the same source.

Behind them, Eddie stirred, waking just as the song switched to a slower, more melancholy tune by The Velvet Underground that he knew Richie only played because it reminded him of V. She looked back over her shoulder as he opened his eyes, the 10 o'clock morning sunshine making her entire figure glow as she smiled down at Richie and handed him the joint. There was a bruise on the outside of her left thigh. Her hair fell in soft waves down her back. Richie stared up at her with his jaw slightly slack, her not noticing how his throat kicked up when she looked back at him. She looked beautiful. Eddie let himself be happy for her, biting back the jealousy on his tongue. He sat up, and the bed creaked just a bit.

Richie turned back to look at him, smiling his signature Trashmouth smile. "Well, shit, Eds! I was wondering when you'd stop dreaming about Patrick Swayze and get the fuck up!" V laughed, her palm pressing against the glass window pane. Eddie rolled his eyes, scooting over beside Richie on the floor. He would have been surprised that Richie hadn't woken him with his loud mouth until now, *but then again*, Eddie thought, *V always had calmed him down*.

"Shut the hell up and pass that," he said, motioning to the joint in his hand.

Richie raised his eyebrows at the smaller boy. "Eddie Kaspbrak? Smoking marijuana? Before 10 PM?" He teased, placing a hand over his mouth in disbelief. He grabbed Eddie's shoulders, shaking him just a bit, the joint still between two fingers of his left hand. "Who are you and what have you done with my Eddie?"

"Oh, leave him alone, Trashmouth," Virginia urged, a smile

spreading across her face. “Let the boy get high in peace.”

So Richie did. Despite the fact that he had never seen Eddie smoke before the sun went down, he handed him the joint and watched as he puffed and coughed a bit, blowing the smoke towards V. She inhaled as much of it as she could, looking like a silent, lazy reenactment of one of Eddie’s asthma attacks. Richie smiled, and when they both looked at him with the typical “What are *you* smiling for?” look he oh too often got, he just shook his fucking head. There weren’t any words. A Radiohead song started playing. Eddie passed the j to Virginia. None of them said anything for a long while.

“When are we supposed to meet up with Stan and Bill again?” Eddie asked after a while.

“Little after noon, I think. The movie doesn’t start until two.”

And so they all sat in that comfortable non-silence, Richie’s head bobbing to the beat of the song as Eddie watched Virginia do the same simple smoke tricks she had always done. They sat like that for hours, so long Richie’s toes went numb, but he didn’t dare move. He didn’t want to be any farther from either of them. In fact, when his absolute least favorite Stones song came up, he let it play all the way through, feeling very little like himself as he watched the goddamn sun shine off the freckles on Virginia’s nose and Eddie’s newly painted hands pull loosely at the threads of the pale pink rug beneath them.

3. Stop Me If You Think You've Heard This One Before

Summary for the Chapter:

1994.

"I think I should get contacts. My mom said she'd get them for me for my birthday..." Richie absently said, staring into the mirror where Virginia was carefully doing her makeup. In the background, the Smiths song from earlier that Eddie had slept through played again. Behind him, Eddie shook his head furiously.

"No way, Rich!"

Richie looked back at him dumbly. "What?"

"You're not getting rid of your glasses, Trashmouth. They're the only cool thing about you," Virginia said simply, smacking her lips against each other to spread out her cotton candy scented lipgloss.

Richie rolled his eyes. "*Cool*, yeah fuckin' right, V," he snorted, shoving the wide brimmed glasses up onto his nose and turning back to Eddie behind him. "Are you sick of her painting her face too or is it just me?" He asked, and Eddie laughed a little, shaking his head.

"No, I don't mind. Besides, she's almost done," he noted, waving a hand at her fixing her hair in her reflection.

"She better be," Richie muttered, turning back to the girl in question. "Come on, V, I told Bill we'd be there by 12:15."

"Like Richie Tozier suddenly cares about being on time," she snickered, pinning a stray piece of hair down on her head.

"No, but I am sick of waiting on your ass, Clark! I mean fuck! We

all know you're ugly underneath it, so what's the point right?" He nudged her side, smiling mischievously, but she just looked at him, wide eyed and obviously hurt.

"Beep, beep, Richie," Eddie mumbled hopelessly, trying to save the situation from going where he already knew it would. While Virginia did calm the taller boy down more often than not, Richie had a gift for pissing her off.

Richie opened his mouth to recover, but she just held up a hand, waving him away. "Put some fucking pants on, Richie," she said simply, pulling her hair up into a ponytail on top of her head.

"I didn't mean it like that, V, come on..."

But Virginia was slipping on her shoes while Eddie still sat on the floor in the middle of the room, hands neatly folded in his lap. "I know what you meant, Richie, but damn..." He whispered to the tall boy as he shrugged on his overshirt. "You can't say that shit to girls."

"Well I'm sorry!" Richie called out too loudly, exasperated, slamming his palms against his sides in a sign of frustration. "I haven't had a *girlfriend* since fucking eighth grade, I forgot-"

But now it was Virginia's time to be too loud, spinning around to face him in a split second, outraged. "*Girlfriend*? Are you kidding me, Rich? You couldn't *pay* me to put up with this bullshit every day!"

Richie just looked at her blankly for a long moment, trying his hardest not to feel anything as she glared back at him. "Okay, look, I'm sorry, V-"

"No, fuck you, Richie! Walk to the fucking theater; I'm not taking you anywhere!" And with that, she slammed the door.

Eddie stared after her for a long moment until Richie buried his face into her bedspread and screamed. When he straightened back up, his hair was tossed into his eyes and his glasses were pushed up tight against the bridge of his nose. "Don't even say it, Eds," he warned, but Eddie turned his way anyway.

"It's your fault. You make her show her ass like that when you're such a dick--"

"Well, maybe I wouldn't seem like such a dick if she weren't so damn sensitive!" He screamed back, and Eddie was sure V could hear him from wherever she was hiding in the house, waiting patiently for the apology she knew she would get.

"Don't yell at me," Eddie said, and Richie buried his face back into the mattress and screamed again. Eddie stopped himself from smiling.

"Sorry, Eds, but I mean fuck. She's being a little bitch, okay?" Richie replied as he finally pulled the dark jeans up his legs. "And now I'm gonna have to go fucking apologize for the *millionth* fucking time even though I just made a fucking joke and *she*--"

Eddie stopped listening as Richie continued to complain, lacing up his boots with a frown on his face. He tried to hide the jealousy creeping its way across his features. *But don't you like her?* He wanted to ask the tall boy dressing before him. *Don't you think about her when you're alone? Aren't you only mad because she ought to know you think she's pretty all the time? Because every time you hear a song about a pretty girl you make sure to show it to her?* But he kept his mouth shut, more afraid of the answer he might receive than the asking itself.

On the other side of the door, Virginia was just now easing herself down the stairs, after listening in on the boys talking for a while. She had a sick, bitter taste in her mouth, and if she had seen herself she would have hated the childish jealousy burning across her face. *Richie*

never screams at Eddie, she thought. Never. Or he'll apologize right after. Eddie's too sweet and special for him to yell at. I'm the one who he doesn't give a fuck if he pisses off.

Richie purposefully knocked into Eddie on his way past him, smiling now down at the boy. "Gimme like five minutes and then you can come on down, Eds. Thanks for chilling me out. You're my favorite."

Eddie's cheeks burned red, and he could barely get out a "Don't call me that" without choking.

Richie shook his head as he approached the door. "Cute, cute, cute!" He screamed, and Eddie buried his face in his hands.

Down in the kitchen, Richie walked up behind Virginia and pulled her back into his chest, his chin resting on her shoulder. "I'm sorry I called you my girlfriend, V. I know you don't like to be reminded that you got tits and all."

Virginia started back at him, unamused. He pinched her cheek. "Come on, Baby! You know I'm kidding."

She smiled a bit at the nickname, and he grinned too, and they stood there for a minute, until suddenly he became aware of her breath fogging up his glasses and pulled away from her, rocking on the back of his heels. "I really am sorry I called you ugly, okay? Won't do it again. Didn't mean it. You're really pretty. Okay?"

Virginia smiled, but less at his words and more at the blood that rose to his cheeks. Whether he meant it or not, he looked like he did. And that was enough for her.

"Okay, I'll drive you to the damn movie. But Eddie gets shotgun."

"Yes!"

“What the fuck, V?”

4. About A Girl

Summary for the Chapter:

1994.

The trio met Stan and Bill for lunch at Bill's place. They stopped on the way to make Richie run in and buy a pizza, but when they walked in, Eddie holding the pizza box out to Stan the minute he opened the door, Bill already had a box sitting on his lap and half a slice of pepperoni hanging from his mouth. Richie thought it was hilarious. Virginia frowned.

"Okay, so, what movie are we watching anyway?" She asked, throwing herself down on the couch. Stan carefully folded his legs up under him next to her. She smiled.

"I don't know - some horror thing Bill and Richie found."

"Oh, great," Eddie scoffed, and Richie and Bill both stood up straighter, indignant.

"What? M-Me and Rich can't pick g-g-good shit?"

Virginia paused for a moment, looking over at Stan with a smile, then nodded. "Precisely."

The boys rolled their eyes almost audibly, and Stan, Eddie, and V (the girls) laughed. Bill and Richie ate and talked about the movie, which they were sure was gonna make Eddie pee himself. Stan and Eddie made small comments back to them and talked about school. When homecoming was brought up, Eddie looked over at Richie thirteen times. This was not the first time Virginia had thought that her best friend was in love with his best friend. She watched until

Richie caught her staring his way, sending her a playful wink. She burned red and stuffed her face full of greasy, high-calorie food her mother would never buy her. Eddie pretended not to see any of it.

They all piled up in Virginia's car to head to the theater. They could have walked, but Bill had been sure to ask Richie if he had smoke, so V took the hint and offered her car to the group, at this point little more than a moving joint with pink seat covers. All five piled inside, Eddie sitting shotgun and Richie, Stan, and Bill in the back. A joint was lit, and passed, and snuffed out before they reached the theater, desperately empty so early in the day. They all piled into one row. Bill and Stan sat closest to the end. Richie sat between Eddie and V.

And Eddie was really trying not to be scared of this dumbass movie. It was dumb, clearly reaching, and the only really scary moments were when the main character repeatedly got covered in blood - a complete and utter biohazard. Still, he noticed out of the corner of his eyes that it was scaring V, and when she emitted a small scream that made all the other boys laugh, Richie silently moved his right hand to sit in her lap. Eddie could feel the heat of her hands in his own, knowing already the softness and warmth of Virginia's entire being. She was so sweet, and gentle, like lemonade with a touch too much sugar. Her hands were soft as newly pressed sheets. Richie's had blisters and cuts and bruises, tough spots and short, bitten nails. The exact opposite.

Eddie was too busy breaking his own heart to notice the monster creeping up in the background of the picture. When it finally popped out, a scream sounded, and he jumped in his seat, letting out a small gasp. Beside him, Richie laughed, and, to Eddie's complete surprise, slipped his hand under the armrest between them and grabbed Eddie's hand. First, like a mother, his fingers crossing diagonally over his, and then like a lover, their finger intertwining with each other. Eddie's palms sweated. Richie didn't say a word. And when he looked over at Virginia, she didn't say a word either. Just smiled, running her soft, manicured fingertips over Richie's knuckles lazily.

Eddie made a promise to himself to never hurt her, no matter what he did.

That night, Virginia dropped Eddie off at his place with his head swimming from all the smoke. He had told her that he could definitely, 100%, for sure sit through a hotbox with the boys before he went home, but Richie had placed a hand on his shoulder twice as he gasped into his inhaler lowkey. Eddie had wanted to be dropped off first, but even if he didn't, he would have. His house was first on the road. Then Virginia's, and two blocks left was Richie's. Eddie always got dropped off first. While Richie pulled out a cigarette from his jacket pocket, Eddie grabbed the door handle with two fingers. "I had fun, guys. You wanna hang tomorrow too?"

Virginia smiled, the kind of soft smile that reminded Eddie that even he thought she was very pretty. "Sure. I'll call you when I get up."

Eddie turned behind him. Richie blew smoke out the window, full lips pursing and exhaling all those horrible chemicals he loved, eyes almost closing in the act of it. Eddie tried to hide the lump in his throat. "What about you, Rich?"

Richie smiled, a too-wide, toothy smile that reminded Eddie of when they were younger, when there were no awkward silences or sweaty palms to ruin their fun. "Of course, Eds. Anything for you."

Eddie smiled and opened the car door. Richie climbed out of the bag while he made sure he had his things and said goodbye to V. He turned to the door and saw his mom's bedroom light on. She would probably, as she always did, tell him that he was screwing up his life, that he had to have better friends, and *why do you smell like smoke Eddie Kaspbrak you better not be smoking anything you know your lungs are fragile we don't spend all this money on medicine just for you to fuck your body up anyway-*

A hand landed against Eddie's ass suddenly, pushing him forward a bit, and he almost tripped over his own feet. He turned around quickly, red in his cheeks, but Richie had already ducked inside the car, grinning up at him through the window. Next to him, Virginia laughed, her hands slamming against the steering wheel as she bent over. Eddie held up his middle finger for a brief second before heading up the walkway. Once they had pulled off, he rubbed the sore spot Richie had slapped, thinking that it would probably leave a mark.

The next morning, just before he got in the shower, he turned and looked at the red mark, the outline of the hand that had held his in the dark theater, where Stan looked over and saw Richie with each hand in someone else's but didn't say a word.

Two blocks left and three blocks down, Richie flicked the butt of his cigarette out the window as Virginia switched on a Nirvana song and pulled into his driveway. All the lights were already on inside, the entire house glowing like some dangerous, bioluminescent creature. Virginia cut the car off. Richie noticed how she didn't do this at Eddie's and rubbed his jaw with one hand. Without the hum of the engine, the only sound other than the music came from inside the house before them. Richie ran a hand through his hair and Virginia pretended not to hear the muffled screaming and occasional crashes coming from inside the creature.

"I'm sorry, V. I—"

Virginia stopped him, turning towards him in her seat. "No. It's fine. My curfew's not 'till midnight anyway. We can just chill out here until they go to bed."

Richie looked over at her, uncharacteristically silent. "*I'll take advantage while you hang me out to dry,*" Kurt Cobain sang to them through the night. The streetlight behind her lit her hair up with the same golden light that had made her so beautiful that morning. "*But I*

can't see you every night..." All of a sudden, he wanted to kiss her. To say he had never wanted to kiss her before would be a lie, and he could tell sometimes in her eyes that she wanted it too.

But something held him back. Earlier, in the theater, there was a hesitance in her hand in his, and she barely looked his way the whole time he stared at her instead of the movie. And when he looked over at Eddie, Eddie was looking back as always, and if they both wanted to kiss him sometimes, Eddie wanted it much more. But why the fuck was he thinking about *Eddie* when there was a beautiful girl in a short skirt sitting next to him?

Realizing he had been quiet too long, he quickly lit up a cigarette and stared out the window blankly. After a while, he put his hand over hers on the console between them. She looked over at him now, not the way she had in the movie, but different. The way Eddie had looked at him in the theater. He looked back at her, eyes wide, cheeks burning a subtle red, thinking nothing but *fuck fuck fuck fuck what the fuck fuck fuck holy shit fuck*. And she was his best friend and he shouldn't be thinking like this but her lips were so pink and pouty and just barely parted and-

All of a sudden they were kissing. It felt like a movie, like a dream, like every other kiss he had had but better, softer. She kissed him like it meant something, like it was important, like she had to. She placed a gentle hand on his cheek. He moved to kiss down her neck, lips dragging along her jaw, and he barely noticed the lack of commotion from inside his house until her hand moved to his chest, and she pushed him back, again so softly, barely a touch. Her eyes were as wide as his had been before. His heart jumped to his throat and lodged itself there, threatening to cut off his air supply.

"Richie-"

But he heard the rejection in her voice and took a hit from the cigarette he forgot he had in his hand, quickly opening the door. "Don't worry about it, V. Let's just... Not, okay? I don't wanna." He said, gathering his things in his free hand.

But there was something in her face he didn't understand. Not rejection, something he didn't know about yet. "No, Richie, stop. I'm not- This isn't..."

He was already out the door. "No, V, it's fine. Don't. I get it. Let's just... Not tell Eds. See you tomorrow okay?"

Before she could answer he was already slamming the door and running up the front steps of his house. Inside, he would scream into his bed pillows for an hour. In her car, she cried the short two block ride home, her chest feeling empty and hollow, gasping for air. *This isn't right*, she had wanted to say. *This isn't what you want. I know you, and I know what you want, and I know who wants you, and I know if I keep kissing you in the driveway of your house while your parents scream inside we're gonna ruin everything we've ever had and we're gonna break Eddie Kaspbrak's heart.*

But she didn't say that. And she wouldn't get to. So she wiped the tears off her face and went inside, her mother asking her why her eyes were so red with a frown on her face, and her father making comments about how short her skirt was to be out with those boys so late. She didn't get to tell them what she was thinking either.

5. Jack & Diane

Summary for the Chapter:

1994.

Sonia Kaspbrak thought woke her son up that morning at 10 am with a frown on her face. Truthfully, he had been awake for at least an hour, first standing for so long his legs hurt in the shower, running soft fingers over the red welts others had left, then lying in only a pair of sleeping pants in bed, thinking about the way Richie had held his hand, how his thumb traced his knuckles every now and then, how his fingers shook too when he first grabbed him. Truthfully, he was faking when he looked oh so sleepy popping his head out from under the covers and batting his eyelashes at his mother standing before him. “Virginia’s on the phone,” she croaked, her eyes cast down (although it was normally up, now, after his growth spurt last summer) at him.

Eddie jumped out of bed and slipped past her in a second, quickly heading down the hallway to the phone. “Thanks, Mom,” he called, stopping short and grabbing the receiver off the counter. “V?” He said, quieter now, into the speaker.

“Yeah, me.” Her voice was soft and sleepy, like a child just after their midday nap. In the pause between this sentence and her next, she let out a small, slow yawn that sounded like the moans in sex scenes at the movies. Eddie felt like a total creep for thinking so and shook his head to himself as she continued. “I’m awake, but barely. You gotta call Richie for me. I need a shower.”

Except Eddie didn’t hear the last four words. His mother was turning, the door of her room already half open, and giving Eddie *the* look. He swallowed hard.

“Yeah, yeah. Gotcha. Be over in a few... Okay, sure, gotta go,

alright, bye.” He took the phone away from his face and carefully set it back down in its place.

Eddie opened his mouth to speak, but his mother beat him to it. “We will have a talk tonight, Eddie. Do whatever you want ‘till then.”

Her door slammed. Behind it, he heard her say to herself, “That’s all you do anyway.”

Eddie stood there, silent, his breath flying away from him for a moment. It wasn’t sadness, or fear, or anxiety; this was pure anger. He bit down on his tongue for a moment, a trick he had learned to distract himself from how hard it was to breathe, and slowly counted inhales to himself, determined not to use *her damn inhaler*. After a few minutes, he was almost normal again, and so he dialed Richie’s number with shaking fingers, his blood burning all throughout him, what Richie would refer to as “pissed as fucking shit.”

“Damn right, Eds. If I were you, I’d be pissed as fucking shit right now,” Richie said, long legs swinging out far ahead of him as they made the walk from Eddie’s house to Virginia’s. Eddie struggled to keep up with the lanky boy, huffing with each step. “You don’t even do bad shit. You barely smoke and you never drink or stay out late or any cool shit!”

Eddie ignored the dig. “She’s crazy. She’s a total fucking psychopath.” Next to him, Richie laughed. “I don’t even know what’s wrong with her anymore.”

They reached Virginia’s driveway and took a right turn, walking around to the old tree with Eddie looking on the ground for a pebble and Richie kicking his feet and humming a tune under his breath. Once Eddie found one just the right size, he looked up, ready to aim, but the window was already open, the pink curtains inside blowing in

the morning breeze.

“Looks like we don’t have to risk breaking a window this time,” Eddie said, dropping the small rock and beginning to climb the ladder. Richie didn’t reply.

As Eddie crawled through the treehouse and shuffled along the thick limb leading to the open window, he heard John Mellencamp’s *Jack & Diane* playing inside Virginia’s bedroom and smiled. She and him used to listen to this song all the time, singing along as loud as they could on the way to and from school.

Around this time, Richie heard the song playing as well and had to swallow through the stiffness in his throat. Virginia used to play this song with him too, back when she used to climb down the very tree he was climbing up and they would go explore the city in the dark, her perfectly manicured hands banging on the steering wheel as he sang along beside her. Those days, autumn two years back, she used to wear his black bomber jacket around her shoulders when it dropped below 40 and stick her cold fingers in her mouth to warm them. Richie wanted to hit himself as he climbed inside the window, *pissed as fucking shit* at himself for doing what he did the night before, for risking friendship with the two people he liked the most. The feeling, though, faded in half a second.

Richie came back to Earth to Eddie tapping on his shoulder, hard, trying to make him face him. “Wha-“ He barely got out before his eyes landed on the thing Eddie was trying to steer him away from. Through the crack in the door of her (albeit small) walk-in closet, Richie could see Virginia’s towel was around her knees, and she was picking different dresses and bras up and holding them against her bare chest, looking into the mirror on the wall away from the boys to see how they looked. She was obviously unaware of their presence, and Richie tried not to be excited when his eyes fell to the soft looking lace pink underwear that hugged her hips and *other parts*-

“Rich!” Eddie whispered, and thankfully Virginia didn’t hear as Richie whipped back around and stared out the window.

“Sorry,” he muttered, and while Eddie frowned at him, he noticed the red in his cheeks and the size of his pupils, the way he shoved his hands in his pockets and shuffled his feet. At least, he wasn’t that mad at Richie for staring too long. “Those the first pair of tits you ever seen, Eddie Spaghetti?” Richie asked, half-joking.

Eddie’s jaw dropped to his chest, and, quickly, like instinct, he rolled his eyes and shoved Richie’s shoulder. “Shut the fuck up, Rich.” He didn’t even say a “don’t call me that!”, figuring if Richie dropped the subject it would be enough for him.

Richie didn’t drop the subject. “Now you know why we like ‘em so much, huh?” Richie whispered, quieter than before, not wanting V to hear him talking about her like this, knowing that would make his face flush like Eddie’s, especially after last night.

The fucked up thing was: maybe Eddie *did*. He did *not* like girls. He did *not* like boobs. And when he saw them in sex scenes in movies and the magazines Richie used to pull out of his backpack and snicker about to Bill in the old days, he didn’t feel *a thing* but mild unease. Now, though, with Virginia standing almost completely naked in the same room as him, hair bouncing along to the beat of the song while holding strappy dresses and fancy sheer bras up to her also bouncing breasts (and that was how he thought of them - *breasts*, not tits like Richie said), he thought maybe he could like the idea of being with a girl, if that girl was Virginia Clark. That thought only led to another that made him bite down on his lower lip. Now, he realized, he was dangerously close to being head over heels for both his best friends, who were both head over heels for the other. His entire world was completely *fucked*. And Richie was laughing at it.

After the red in Eddie’s cheeks died down and Richie stopped tapping his feet against the floor impatiently, Virginia emerged from the closet, wearing a simple white dress. He shouldn’t have known it, but still Eddie knew she had slipped on a lacy bra underneath it that almost matched her skin.

Richie was clueless and hated himself for it, his teeth almost shattering against each other as he patiently waited for his chest to stop closing in on itself. All she had said was his name, but he could still hear it ringing in his ears. “Richie...” Her lips were parted just so. Her eyebrows drew in on themselves. Her head was tilted to the side just a bit. And her hand pressed against his chest, soft but too hard, keeping him from nipping at the pale skin of her unkissed neck and her already kissed lips, still swollen and wet from his kiss. Now, on top of that shit, he had to worry about the way Eddie was biting down on his lip and trying his hardest not to stare over at her. He had been enamored with Virginia Clark long enough to know the things she did to a man. And Richie couldn’t lose Eddie too. The idea of baby blue Eddie and pale pink Virginia growing up and making beautiful lavender children while shitty yellow Richie stayed behind in Derry, listening to the same songs they used to sing together alone sounded like *absolute fucking Hell*, and it scared him more than he wished it did.

When Virginia noticed them already standing in her room, it was her turn to turn pink, raising her eyebrows at the boys. “How long have you guys been in here?”

“Oh, w-“ Richie started, but Eddie took over, shrugging his shoulders beside him.

“We just came in. You didn’t hear Richie stub his toe against your bed? Dumbass.”

6. Creep

Summary for the Chapter:

1994.

Eddie sat on Virginia's bed, Richie laying down sideways behind him and V sat just in front of him, tapping her fingers against her knees and singing along softly to the Radiohead vinyl she had stolen her dad's old record player to listen to. Eddie had his fingers in her hair, twisting it into two braids while she bopped her head to the music and he tried to keep from pulling down too hard on her locks.

They were all quiet for a long time, and had been most of the day. The only sound (other than Eddie's own breathing and Richie making the bed springs squeak as he bounced his legs to the beat) was Virginia's perfectly feminine tone, not as smooth as it could be but soulful and sweet, winding its way through the room. The song slowly faded out. The first bars of Creep played. Virginia gasped in front of him.

"Fuck, I love this song!" She squealed, bouncing a bit in place, making Eddie drop a section of her hair. He just smiled at the back of her head, picking up the piece he dropped and going back to his handiwork. Behind him, Richie looked up from the off-white carpet to watch them.

This was the very moment that Richie Tozier realized he was, truly, without a doubt, desperately infatuated with the two people before him.

Virginia, he had always sort of known about Virginia. Bill used to tease him about it when he first met her. She was fifteen, and he was fourteen, and some piece of shit Senior had pushed him down in the hallway on his sixth day of ninth grade and broken his glasses, and Virginia was the only one nice enough in the entire fucking school to kneel down and see if he was alright. Then, she took him to the art

room (*Ms. Cole, the art teacher, was practically her second mother*, she had told him) and held him superglue the broken frame back together. Then she complimented his Rolling Stones shirt, and soon after she and Eddie became best friends and he had a wonderful excuse to show up at her house every weekend. And every weekend, for three years now, he had showed up and she had given him one more reason to fall in love with her. Now, all of a sudden (for some reason fucking *now*, after he had already kissed her and she had chewed up his heart and spit it out), as she sang along to a song he had showed her, Richie realized there was nowhere left to fall.

Eddie let out a small huff in front of him, and Richie almost audibly sighed but caught himself at the last second.

He hadn't seen Eddie coming. Years later, he would realize that he had always known Eddie was in love with him, that he had simply ignored the fact until it was impossible to deny, that he was just too dumb and blind to see it. But now, in Virginia Clark's bedroom, as the song dragged on and Eddie carefully focused on twisting his fingers just right, Richie realized something else. He realized that he simply hadn't let himself think of Eddie like *that*, the way he thought of *girls*. If he ignored the intruding thoughts that his parents would murder him if he ever brought *a boy* home, he realized that Eddie was undeniably perfect for him. He knew Eddie; he loved Eddie; he could picture a fucking life with Eddie: three kids and a yard and a dog that would make Eds sneeze too much and a house on a fucking hill with a fucking white picket fucking fence. All the things everyone always told him he would feel when he met the perfect *girl*, he felt with Eddie.

Virginia's voice brought him back to the room, still singing that same, slow, sweet song as Eddie wrapped a rubber band around the last braid. "There you go, V," He said, quiet, his fingers lingering on her shoulders a touch too long. She smiled back at him, running her hands over them.

Richie loved them both. But Eddie hadn't pushed him away yet,

and he would be goddamned if he was going to let both the loves of his teenage life get away from him.

Eddie was ahead of him on the way out of Virginia's yard that night, and, instead of turning left or cutting through the neighbor's yard to get to his house, Richie trailed behind Eddie and went right. "Need a walk home, princess?" He called, trying to lay it on thick, his hands secretly shaking in his pockets.

"Fuck off, Richie," Eddie answered, but Richie noticed now how he slowed just enough to let the taller boy catch up.

They walked for just a few moments in silence before Richie's impulses got the best of him and he cleared his throat roughly. "Hey, Eds?"

The smaller boy looked over at him, brown eyes soft and wide, a hint of a smile on his lips. "Don't call me that," he said, but Richie shook his head.

"No. I wanna talk to you."

Eddie stopped walking, staring over at Richie with even wider eyes now, but Richie grabbed his elbow and pulled him along, seeing the streetlight by his house and knowing if he could just get this all out before he got there he would be alright. "Keep walking, dumbass. Just... Just listen to me, okay?"

"Okay," Eddie whispered, feeling very small and scared at the seriousness in Richie's tone.

Richie took a deep breath, his lungs almost screaming as they

reached their full capacity, and then let it all out, tongue tumbling over the syllables like a clumsy child, his hands no longer shaking in his pockets. "When you told me you were gay, Eds, I was so shocked. I mean, you know I didn't care, I've never cared, I don't give a fuck what you are, but... I don't know. It just blew me out of the water, you know? And for so long now I've been trying to figure out why and I never really wanted to think about it like this but... I guess I'm a little gay too."

Eddie's breath caught in his throat, and it took everything in him to keep his feet moving when Richie said his next words.

"At least... I'm a little gay for *you*, I guess."

Eddie gasped. Really, truly, audibly gasped, and Richie looked over at him with such concern that he knew he had to fight through the tightness in his throat and say something back. "You're fucking kidding me, right? That's not funny, Richie."

Richie coughed to clear the lump in his own throat. "I wish I was, Eds."

And now they had reached the streetlight and Richie slowed to a stop and Eddie did the same, facing him with his jaw slightly slack, the light behind him making him light up and seem *fucking pretty*, and Richie would always mark this as the first moment he ever realized boys could be pretty. "I just... I want..." He tried to start, but his thoughts didn't make sense to him, and he looked down at Eddie with his fingernails still painted pale pink and did what he had to do.

He kissed the smaller boy, at first pushing him back a little and making them both trip but then Richie wrapped his arms around Eddie's waist and Eddie melted into him, becoming absolute putty in his hands. He kissed him back hard, sure, and they moved against each other like tectonic plates, slowly pushing their bodies against

each other until Eddie was gasping into Richie's chest for air and Richie was kissing the top of his head and laughing under his breath.

"So, what now, Eds?" He asked, a little out of breath himself, smiling into Eddie's hair. "What are we, boyfriends or something?"

And, of course, they both knew they were.

Eddie didn't answer, but he didn't have to. In fact, he didn't say another word that entire night, only kissing Richie one more time, softer now, his hands in fists against his shoulders, and walking inside. His mother tried to talk to him, but every word went right past his head, Eddie's only thought circling around the taste of cigarettes and mint in his mouth.

7. Tiny Dancer

Summary for the Chapter:

1994.

Virginia tucked a stray strand of hair behind her ear and stuck the tip of her tongue out between her teeth, focusing on painting her nails a deeper, duller pink than normal. The color made her look more grown up, more mature, more like a *woman*. Eddie didn't have the guts to draw her attention back to him. Richie did.

"Virgin!" He screamed. She jumped, her hand twitching and making her drag the brush across the top of her finger.

"Richie, what the fuck?" She shouted in response, looking up at him, both pissed and confused.

It had been a five days since Eddie and Richie had decided to shack up, almost a week, and looking back it would seem like minutes but at the time it felt like years. At least, it felt like years when they were trying to hide it from Virginia. No goodbye kisses when she dropped them both off from their "study sessions" after school, no holding hands in front of her (Richie was convinced she wouldn't ask about it but Eddie wasn't so sure), no "sure, honey"s or "gotcha, babe"s.

It was a lot harder than Eddie had imagined: hiding it from her. She was his best friend, more than anything else, and he wanted to tell her every time Richie even looked at him the right way. It felt terribly unfair to him for them to hide it from her, even for so long, but it was *hard* to tell her. It was hard even now, with Richie sitting next to him on her bed and her painting her perfectly rounded nails in front of them, to get the courage to look her in the face and tell her words he knew would hurt her quite a bit. It was hard, he decided, to break someone's heart, especially when you loved them so much.

And he did love her so much. He didn't know how much, not yet, still unsure of the feelings growing deep inside his gut, but he knew he did love her very, very much. Just as much as he loved Richie.

"Will you please just listen to us for a minute, you fuckin' clutz?"

Virginia pouted her (perfect) lips, screwing the small polish bottle shut and tossing it onto the bed beside her. "There. Fucking sorry. Didn't know it was this important," she said, a hint of sarcasm in her voice. In her anger, the part of her nose that was most freckled scrunched up, and she looked like a very beautiful Little Rascal. Richie had to swallow very hard before he could say anything else, an unknown guilt threatening to close his windpipe.

"Eddie and I are dating."

Eddie's eyebrows drew in together, and his first instinct was to slap Richie on the arm. "Beep, beep, asshole," he said harshly.

"That's literally what we had to tell her."

"But you didn't have to say it like that!"

In front of them, Virginia felt like she was gonna pass out. Her palms were sweating, and she just watched Eddie's fingers drum against the outside of his leg, a habit he had picked up from her, but she didn't look at Richie. She couldn't look at Richie.

She smiled at them, the sort of customer service smile she learned to do while working on the yearbook in school. *You're crazy*, She thought to herself. *You've always been crazy. To think a boy like Richie Tozier could like you, to want to take him from Eddie, to want to take Eddie from him.* Because she did, and she realized now. She didn't want them together because them together meant them without her. She wanted them both, desperately - the cigarette smoking

trashmouth and the soft hypochondriac sweetheart. She wanted to wake up in the morning with them, both of them, her best friend and her wannabe lover. Or maybe they were both both. Eddie was so quiet with her sometimes, so patient, so kind, and while she was being honest with herself, maybe she was so scared of hurting him because she *liked* him; because the term best friend had always meant more to her than it did to other people; because one time when they got high and Eddie danced with her to Elton John, he kissed her nose and she felt like she was absolutely fucking flying; because one time the only boyfriend she'd ever had called Eddie a "fag" and Virginia left him before she even got a first kiss and she hadn't kissed a boy since (creating the horrible nickname for her), until Richie the other night; because one time he had peeked over at her with red cheeks in a movie theater while they were both holding the same boys hand and Virginia had made a promise to herself never to hurt him, her angel, her precious boy.

She had started crying. Eddie jumped forward to hug her, and she laughed against his shoulder, trying to sound as lighthearted as possible. "I'm not sad, Eds. I'm happy! This is fucking amazing."

Richie leaned forward and wrapped his long arms around both of them, and under his touch, she sobbed, feeling horrible for getting mascara and snot and tears all over Eddie's new sweater. "It's amazing," she repeated, and the boys both thought it sounded awful lot like she was trying to convince herself.

Richie walked Eddie home after Virginia had stopped crying and forced herself to ask them no questions, her half-painted nails pressing into her palms the whole time, every time they touched, every time Eddie tugged on the now wet shoulder of his sweater and Virginia couldn't help but stare at the purplish-pink hickeys that marked his neck and chest. Virginia could have watched them out her bedroom window as Richie grabbed his hand and swung it between them, smiling down at the shorter boy and trying to cheer him up.

Instead, she picked through her old cassettes, looking for the perfect one with the perfect song, her tears already falling before she

clicked it into the tape player. The machine hummed to life, and she was grateful she hadn't switched to CDs, proud of the clicks and loose sounds that played through the speakers as the piano faded in and Elton John began to sing to her.

She sat down on the floor, her back to the edge of her bed, tucking her toes under her.

"Pretty eyed, pirate smile, you'll marry a music man..."

And she closed her eyes and the tears poured down her face, lonely and terrified, convinced she had lost the two people in the world she loved most, for a long time, letting the song roll over her, almost feeling the pressure of that gentle kiss on her nose and that urgent one on her lips.

"Hold me closer, tiny dancer. Count the headlights on the highway..."

8. With or Without You

Summary for the Chapter:

1994.

A week passed. Stan's birthday was on Saturday, but Eddie and Richie were over at Bill's on Thursday, already setting up for his party. Or, at least, pretending to set up for the party. After about an hour, they had called Virginia and she had brought some pot and everyone had gotten horribly high, too high, so high they lost track of time and space and boundaries. Eddie and Richie sat on the couch, Eddie's legs slung over Richie's lap, Richie's hair falling into his face. Bill was slumped in his father's armchair, a beer in his right hand, silently so happy his parents had left him the house for the long weekend. Virginia was lying down on the rug, eyes closed, breathing slowly as she felt every vibration of the song playing through Bill's stereo: U2's *With or Without You*, a song Virginia had actually showed Richie, a rare occurrence.

Richie was tapping his foot against the floor. Eddie stared at him as he stared at Virginia, both too high to notice their unwandering eyes.

She was so fucking beautiful. It made Richie feel sick, the chips he had ate earlier threatening to come back up, his palm sweating against the bottle in his fist. He *liked* Eddie; he *loved* Eddie. But that just wasn't enough for Richie - no, he wanted both of them. He wanted *her*, too.

He tried to stop self-loathing, but it got him nowhere. Virginia had flirted with a boy in her History class that day and felt the need to tell the boys the details the moment she arrived, her eyes sparkling, Richie feeling like a piece of fucking shit as he had to fake a smile back at her.

It was wrong for him to want her. You didn't do this shit. You

didn't have a boyfriend who you were completely obsessed with and just happen to still dream about his best friend as often as you dreamed about him. It felt like cheating, like betrayal, like Hell.

Eddie watched his boyfriend's eyes never leave Virginia's face, expecting to feel jealousy but instead feeling something else. Richie liked him, maybe loved him even, this he was sure of. He just... liked V too. And Eddie would be an idiot to ignore that.

Of course he liked her. She was amazing, insane, soft and sweet and beautiful all at once. She was almost perfect, would pass as such for strangers on the street.

But, Eddie realized, he wasn't angry at Richie for being obsessed with her. He was also obsessed with her, his entire world wrapped around her remarkably manicured fingers, the look on her face changing his mood unfailingly. She was the moon, hanging over the two of them both and turning the tides of their lives. Richie would be an idiot not to like her so much, Eddie said to himself. Any man would.

All of a sudden, Richie tapped Eddie's leg, hard, pushing it up and off of him. "I gotta go to the bathroom," he choked out, but Eddie was close enough to see the tear streaking its way down his cheek.

He followed his boyfriend silently down the hall, and Richie didn't protest, knowing his was caught. As they hurried away from her, he heard Virginia ask what was wrong. He tried not to sob into his fist.

"What's wrong?" Eddie asked, whispering so softly Richie could barely hear him, as he stopped at the end of the hall and leaned against the bathroom door without opening it.

"I really like you, Eddie..."

And just like that, Eddie was scared, so scared, his hands trembling at the sound of Richie's voice. He waited for the catch, for the nightmare, for the goodbye he already heard on his lover's tongue.

"But what?" Eddie asked, eyes wide and voice shaking, and Richie looked back at him, suddenly just as scared, grabbing the smaller boy by the shoulders and pulling him tight into his chest.

"No. No but. But nothing. God, don't you fucking cry too, Eds. I can't *handle* that shit," Richie begged, his mouth running a mile a minute, still crying himself. "I like you, honey, I'm always gonna like you, I just..."

Eddie didn't know what he was gonna say next, but he held back the gasp that threatened to escape when he found out.

"I just like Virginia." And he sobbed, his chest shaking against the other boys', hands still wrapped around his shoulders. "I like her, too. And I feel like a piece of shit and I want to be with you so much but I want to be with her too and I just don't know what to do and I'm so scared I'm gonna hurt either of you and I'm acting like a *fucking pussy* and I swear sometimes I love you, dude, like I really *love* you and I can't lose you and I can't lose her and I just want to be with both of you so *goddamn* badly..." His words faded into nothing, his voice cracking and fading out like a lost radio signal.

And this was when Eddie made the decision, the biggest decision he ever made, the one he would tell his kids about, the one he would never regret his entire life. He didn't think, barely paused, before answering, his eyes closed as his face still pressed against Richie's chest.

"So be with both of us, then."

In Bill's living room, Virginia pretended to listen to the song playing as her head swam, the pot affecting her in more ways than she had realized, fighting back her own tears as she pictured Richie and Eddie kissing in the bathroom, Richie and Eddie holding hands under the table at their favorite restaurant, Richie and Eddie sleeping in each other's arms, perfectly content and happy without her. All of it without her.

9. Just Like Heaven

Summary for the Chapter:

1994.

“Show me how you do it... and I promise that I’ll run away with you, I’ll run away with you...”

Virginia tapped her hands against the steering wheel as she always did, and beside her, Eddie stared, pretending not to be too enamored by the way her hair bounced around her shoulders and fell into her eyes as she sang along in her own driveway.

Richie sat in the back, and Eddie eventually looked over to see him staring right back at the boy. He smiled, that signature Trashmouth smile, and Eddie’s heartbeat felt wonderfully flighty.

“Why are you so far away? She said. Why won’t you ever know that I’m in love with you...”

“Now?” Richie mouthed to Eddie, and his stomach dropped, but he knew this was as good a time as ever. He nodded.

Richie leaned up and turned down the radio, popping his head between Virginia and Eddie in the front seat. “We gotta have a talk, V,” He started, and Eddie tried to keep his chest from caving in.

He was terrified. He didn’t want to hurt her, or lose her, or piss her off, and there weren’t any books or articles at the library about how to offer your boyfriend to your best friend *in a chill way*. It could make her hate him, easily, he thought. The thought made his spine shake, and he realized that he was probably more afraid of the rejection than Richie was right now.

He wasn’t. Richie was shaking all over, having to focus very hard on getting his words out without stuttering, feeling all too much like Big Bill. She had already turned him down once, and now he was trying again, and he knew better than any of them that this time could be the last, this song could be their last, this night could be

their last.

Virginia looked over at him happily. She was so fucking *pretty*, long eyelashes and light freckles and those oh so soft lips. He tried to catch his breath. “Did you two break up already?” She teased a bit, knowing full well they hadn’t, trying to lighten the mood as her two best friends looked at her both like they were about to shit themselves.

“No, uh...” Richie trailed off, and Eddie decided to help him out, putting his hand over hers on the steering wheel.

“I love you, V. You’re my best friend in the whole world, okay?”

Virginia nodded, slowly, scared now herself, her insides melting at the sound of his voice, so soft and sweet, so sincere. “Okay? I love you too. But... I don’t-”

Richie cut her off, his hands still shaking as he buried them in his hair and looked down, not having the nerve to meet her eyes as he said his next words. “I *like* you, V.”

It felt like fifth grade again, and Eddie’s throat closed up as Virginia’s eyes widened. She grabbed Richie’s wrist and pulled him up to face her. She stared at him for a long moment, trying to decide if this was a joke or a prank or some bullshit Trashmouth thing. Richie’s wrist shook in her hand, and he grimaced as he finally forced it to stop, his breath shallow and short in his chest. Eddie stared on, eyes wide, until Virginia looked over at him. He looked away immediately, and she frowned at him.

“You guys, if this is-”

Eddie decided to be brave again. “It’s not.” She stared at him for a long time again, the way she had stared at Richie. “I- He told me. And I told him to tell you, and... I mean, this is gonna sound weird. Promise you won’t laugh?”

“Promise,” she squeaked, her own throat threatening to go dry on her.

Eddie took a deep breath. “I told him that, if you were okay with it,

I would be okay with him... Being with you too. If that's what he wants."

Virginia's head whipped around to Richie. "That's what you want?" She asked, quiet, not wanting to upset him any more.

"Yeah," Richie croaked. Eddie rubbed a hand across his back, and he slowly straightened up. "But if you don't-"

"You're okay with it?" She cut him off, turning to Eddie now. "You don't mind? You don't... It wouldn't make you jealous or..." Eddie shook his head. "No. I love both of you guys. I don't... I don't care. If it makes both of you happy."

Virginia swallowed, thick, her jaw tight, nails digging into her palm like always. "But you don't wanna be my boyfriend, right, Eddie?" She asked, voice small and unsure, half joking and half really wondering, half hopeful.

Richie turned his own head to Eddie now, and they both stared at him, the two people he cared for most. Richie with his too big glasses he always haphazardly threw when they made out, never caring where they landed or how hard. Virginia with her babydoll dresses and perfect lips and soft legs, the ones she would sometimes wrap around Eddie as they slept together and he would know he ought to be annoyed but never could. It was this moment that he realized he *did* want to be her boyfriend too. But Richie didn't know that, and to tell him like this would be fucked, and it's not like they could all date each other anyway.

"No," Eddie laughed out. "Not me."

That night was not a last night, that song not a last song, that time not the last time they would feel the things they felt. Eddie and Virginia had to drop Richie off first ("*You guys are great but Goonies is on TV tonight and I am not missing that shit,*" he had explained), and when V pulled into his driveway, he popped his head up between them again, grinning. "See you guys tomorrow, right?" They both nodded. He smiled. "Okay, call me," He said, first looking at Eddie

and then over at Virginia. “Both of you. Okay?” They both nodded again, blushing, and Richie couldn’t hold back the smile on his face if he tried.

He turned his head and kissed Eddie, his mouth just barely open, a hand around the other boy’s neck. “Night, honey,” he whispered, and Eddie really thought his heart had stopped for a moment.

Richie turned to Virginia, and they stared at each other, both too scared to make the first move, Eddie watching silently in the seat beside them. Then, Virginia leaned in and kissed him, softly (even Eddie could tell you *softly*, her lips just barely brushing over his and her hand cupping his chin). His glasses pressed up against his nose as he kissed her back, so slowly, so softly, trying his hardest not to bite down on her gentle lips. Eddie was still watching, and as he watched, he tried not to think about why the sight of them kissing made him so happy, but moreso just the fact that it did, and that was all that mattered.

Richie pulled away, smiling wide, twisting a piece of her hair as his hand fell from her cheek. “Goodnight, Baby.”

Virginia smiled back, red as ever, before turning away from him to hide her happiness. Eddie and Richie both laughed. The sound of it rang in her ears for a long while.

Richie ran inside, desperate not to miss his movie, and Virginia looked over at Eddie, her cheeks still hot, and he looked back. For a moment he was sure she would kiss him, too, just as softly as she had kissed Richie, but then she laughed, and it felt just as good as any kiss he had ever had, making him laugh along just by the sound of it and the excitement of it all.

After a while, she pulled out of Richie’s and took Eddie home. They sat in his driveway for a while, listening to a few more songs, but then it was 11:15 and Eddie’s curfew was 11:30 and Sonia always bitched if he came in right on time so Eddie looked over at Virginia and smiled, and she smiled back. He hugged her, hard, his hands slightly clammy against her back, but she didn’t even notice, instead focusing on the way he smelled, like cough drops and expensive shampoo. When they pulled apart, Eddie’s cheek brushed against

hers. They both had to still their beating hearts.

10. Loser

Summary for the Chapter:

1994.

Stan's party was actually a lot cooler than Eddie had thought it would be. He was a little nervous that Richie would fuck it up so bad Bill couldn't bring it back, but it ended up pretty nice. Richie was in charge of music and played songs Stan liked (*I Wanna Dance with Somebody*) and songs Eddie and Virginia liked (*Purple Rain*) and the weird shit he and Bill liked (*that one song that goes "I wanna fuck you like an animal,"* Eddie couldn't remember the name but he fucking played it) and somehow made them all fade into each other so that each time one group's song would fade out, the other's would fade in and everyone would be happy because somebody was happy. Bill did the practical work: got the house, got the beer, got the money to give Virginia to give Richie for the pot, got new doorknobs for two of the rooms so they could lock everyone out, all that good shit. Virginia did the fun work: bought the cake and wrote "Happy 18th Birthday Hannukslut!" in pretty script across the top, invited a lot of girls and stuff that made Stan smile, kept Richie happy by buying him two ("Two?!" Eddie had shouted) packs of Marlboros, made Jell-o shots with Bill's Mom's cupcake tin. And Eddie was the moral support and clean-up, what might have otherwise been Stan's job if he wasn't the birthday boy. In the end, it wasn't a fucking *banger*, but it was a party, and it was good, and there were just enough girls for Eddie to be a little uncomfortable and just enough of his friends that he could always find someone to talk to about it. Eddie had just emerged from the bathroom in search of someone when he saw them.

Richie had his arm around Virginia's shoulders, her soft hair blowing in the wind as he looked down at her and she talked excitedly to some girl Eddie didn't recognize. Richie was smiling the smile he gave Eddie sometimes, and the shorter boy pulled on his boyfriend's jacket around his shoulders. Richie looked back at him then, and Eddie turned red and looked away, nervous to be caught staring. Richie just placed a quick kiss on the top of Virginia's head and walked his way, arms out. Eddie hugged him before he should

have, collapsing into his chest. Richie laughed.

Virginia was still talking to the girl, her hands waving as she explained something important, and Eddie smiled at the sight. He didn't realize he had been looking at her too long until the girl she was talking to was suddenly gone and V was just sipping from a Solo cup and staring around. The two made eye contact, and then Virginia quickly looked away, smiling. Richie leaned into Eddie's ear. "Kiss her," he said simply.

Eddie looked up at him, confused and nervous, but Richie just shrugged. "I don't care. It'd be hot." Eddie didn't answer, frozen. "Just do it, princess," Richie urged, pushing Eddie towards her with a slap on his ass.

Turning red and looking to make sure no one saw his boyfriend's move, Eddie stepped forward anxiously, towards Virginia. She smiled when she saw him walking to her. "Hey, Eds," she said, her voice soft and pleasing, and his palms began to sweat.

He didn't think, didn't allow himself to, just took her face in his hands and kissed her, at first more urgent but slowing, shifting, changing into something else entirely. At first it was need, desperation, lust, but her soft lips and cautious tongue twisted the kiss into something else - desire, adoration, love. She kissed him, and all of a sudden he began to believe in her, to believe in the three of them, to believe that something beautiful had been born by their nervous laughter and gentle kisses.

The song switched as they pulled away, her hand still on his cheek. He realized they had been kissing to Loser by Beck and hated Richie for it. She just smiled at him. "What was that for?" She asked, voice small and gentle.

Eddie shrugged, one arm of Richie's jacket falling off his left shoulder. He took it off and wrapped it around her without even thinking, covering her bare, freckled shoulders by pure instinct to protect. "Just because."

When it was time to sing Stan happy birthday, everyone was already wasted, and Richie stood between Virginia and Eddie, trying to scream the words louder than Bill, who had Stan in a headlock as he sang. Eddie laughed along and Virginia did too, Richie's arms around both of them, and that was the very first time they were truly together, all three of them, all at once. Strangers stared on, confused at how Richie would stare at both of them like lovers and they would stare back the same way.

When it was time to go home, they had to bribe Johnny DeLange, who lived just down the street from them, to drive Virginia's car home, as they were all too drunk to drive, and instead of splitting up like usual, they all piled into the back, a mess of limbs and shaking hands and cigarette smoke from Richie (and a little of V, she kept sneaking hits when Eddie looked away and blowing the smoke downward to keep him from noticing; he noticed anyway). When they got there, Virginia ran inside, unlocked the window, and was already undressing when the boys climbed inside.

As Johnny DeLange walked the four blocks back to his place, a fresh five dollar bill in his pocket and one of Richie Tozier's cigarettes smoking in his hand, he heard the very beginnings of Virginia Clark, *Loser Virgin*, and her two boyfriends laughing and tumbling their way into bed together, where that nickname would soon be rendered useless, the end of an era, the start of a lifetime.

Notes for the Chapter:

shorter than normal, but i think y'all are gonna love the next chapter. ill try to get it up asap!! love you guys <3

11. Don't Leave Me

Summary for the Chapter:

1999.

The classroom was desperately empty. It was the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, and most all of her classmates had already gone home from Los Angeles for the holidays. Virginia Clark sat patiently, hands in her lap, hair tied neatly back, and took notes on the few lecture slides her professor had prepared.

She had gotten tan in the few years she had lived here, not tan to others but tan to her, a couple shades deeper than the almost porcelain she had been in Maine. Her hair was much longer, too, and lighter, but she still looked much the same. Her nail polish was chipped at the tips from washing dishes and writing. Her normally perfectly ironed blouse had been swapped for a Iron Maiden t-shirt that still smelled like boy. But she was still Virginia.

45 minutes early, she was released from class. On the way out the door, a blonde girl she had known from Biology a year ago invited her to a party that night. She said she might go. She lied.

Virginia knew perfectly well what she had planned that night. She rushed home, for some reason in a hurry, to her small two-bedroom on the North side. On her way in, she stopped and fed the cats at the door, letting the black furry animal rub against her leg. She smiled.

Richie walked out of the bathroom, still in just underwear at 4:43 on a Thursday. He had Space Jam boxers on and a comb running through his wild hair which had grown even wilder over the last few years. His shoulder had gotten bulkier, his chest fuller, his voice lower. She smiled at the sight of him. "Morning, Baby. You're home early," he said, and she rolled her eyes.

"Not morning. And only a few minutes early." She walked up to him, hips swinging, and Richie's mouth turned up a bit at the edges. "What are you doing, huh, sweetie?" She asked, her voice lower than normal, running a finger down his chest as he smirked down at her.

“Do you think we’ve got time-“

Her sentence was meant to be ended with “*before Eddie gets home,*” but just then Eddie called from the couch. “V? You’re home already?”

Virginia sighed, her hand falling away from Richie’s chest dumbly, and Richie laughed, bending over a bit and leaning against the wall behind him. “Oh, shut up,” Virginia sneered, annoyed now, walking over in Eddie’s direction. Richie slapped her ass on the way. She glared back at him. “You got off early, Eds?”

Eddie was sitting on their old couch, also shirtless but in sweatpants, flipping through channels on television. “Yeah, we weren’t too busy and I didn’t feel great.” Eddie had grown several inches himself, but was still overall the small, soft boy he had always been. His hair was longer now, just barely not falling into his eyes. Virginia thought he had only gotten more gorgeous.

She sat down next to him, swinging her legs over his lap, and he traced loose lines down her shins and thighs with wandering fingers. He turned on a documentary about the Holocaust. Behind them, Richie groaned.

“Can’t we watch something fun, Eddie? You always put on the worst shit,” he complained, but Virginia grabbed Eddie’s hand in hers as he tried to grab the remote again.

“Beep, beep,” She said simply, and Richie fell down beside them, eventually laying with his head on Virginia’s legs, and Eddie played with his hair until he fell asleep on the day before Thanksgiving, mumbling about how there was a new episode of Friends on tomorrow he wanted to see. His lovers just smiled.

That night, Richie went to his room and Eddie went to his, and Virginia sat in the kitchen for a while after, drinking an almost cold cup of coffee and watching the clock on the oven tick the slow minutes by with no excitement for their passing. After a long while, Eddie peeked his head out of his room to look at her. She pretended to be distracted with something else.

"I got a new song if you wanna hear it," he called to her. Suddenly, she looked up, an excitement in her eyes. Eddie giggled. "Come on, then," He said, and motioned into his room.

She stood and followed, staring around Eddie's room once she got inside, as she always did. Eddie's room was really her room too. So was Richie's, in a way, but Eddie's was where all her things lived: all her clothes in the closet beside his, her old cassette tapes stacked in shoeboxes on a shelf, her makeup and hair things on his desk, her pale pink comforter on his bed. The walls were painted a pale yellow, a color that made her smile every time she saw it, and Eddie's pills were all laid out on his bedside table, with a post-it note for each one telling him when and why to take it. Books were piled neatly in the corners. The bed was, of course, made. It was perfect. She sat on the bed, and Eddie switched on a new song by Blink-182. Her head bopped to the beat.

"Don't leave me all alone. Just drop me off at home. I'll be fine; it's not the first. Just like last time but a little worse..."

Eddie sat behind her and braided a section of her hair, slowly, gently, his fingers like ghosts moving through her long locks. After a while, she turned to him, and he kissed her, just as softly and gently as ever, a kiss that reminded her of being newly 18 and having skinned knees and a gay best friend. He wrapped a hand up in her hair then, and pulled, tight, and she groaned as her head leaned back and his lips attached themselves to her neck. They made love there, in Eddie's bed with Virginia's comforter beneath them, and, after, Virginia shrugged on one of his sweaters and excused herself to go smoke a cigarette outside. Eddie didn't follow, but pressed a soft kiss to her temple as she left, still trying to catch his breath.

She smoked slowly, savoring every minute, the smoke looking like the ghosts of old memories as it escaped her soft lips, fuller now than before, and after it was over, she snuck back inside and entered Richie's room, still only in Eddie's soft green sweater. Richie was sitting in bed smoking, something Eddie always gave him a hard time about but Virginia never minded. Eddie's room was where Virginia's stuff lived, but Richie's room was where she lived. The empty pizza boxes and beer bottles scattered across the floor made no difference to her, and there was a sort of beauty in lying on a broken mattress

on the floor with a boy like Richie. So, she laid beside him, the sweater inching up on her hips and revealing her bare ass to him, and he smiled at the still-red handprint he found there.

“Next time, I get to watch,” he mumbled as he turned her over on top of him. She pushed his hands back, pinning them beside us head and frowning down at him.

“Not now, Richie, I’m tired,” she complained.

Richie just grinned. He could see the smile in her eyes, could feel her hands shaking as they held his. “No, you’re not,” he argued, and he was right, and Virginia made love to him then, too, his hands touching every part of her beautiful figure and his lips following in their place shortly after. When they were done, the same song Eddie had played before switched on the radio, and Virginia hummed herself to sleep, Richie’s arm around her waist.

“Let’s try this one more time with feeling, one more time with feeling...”

12. Buddy Holly

Eddie really didn't know why he even bothered trying to include Richie in anything anymore. The taller boy would always pout whenever Eddie would give V gifts or do her favors without him, but it was so much worse when he tried to help. Eddie had woken up early to make her breakfast, knowing that she would end up cooking Thanksgiving dinner for the boys and all their friends that night, and he had (for some reason) asked Richie if he wanted to help. After a short but heavy makeout and a cigarette break, Richie was standing beside Eddie in the kitchen, both of them in only boxers and Eddie in his bedroom slippers too, and they were both cluelessly trying to figure out how to make French toast.

"We're fucked," Richie muttered, staring down at the eggs, milk, and bread spread out before him, and Eddie rolled his eyes.

"Not fucked. We're the *opposite* of fucked if we don't figure this out," Eddie replied, picking up a bowl off the counter and cracking an egg into it.

"We could always just fuck each other."

"Richie..." Eddie groaned, reaching out to grab the milk next.

"Okay, whatever. We'll figure it out. I took Home Ec in high school. Let me just get some music going."

But he didn't *just get some music going*. He absolutely blared Buddy Holly by Weezer, so loud it woke Virginia almost immediately, and Eddie tried his best to remember how Virginia used to do this when he was hungover. He ended up getting it almost right, and Richie set up the table and poured the drinks, singing along under his breath in what sounded like an impression of himself at 15. Eddie tried not to laugh.

"That's so loud, Rich! You're gonna wake her up!"

Richie rolled his eyes. "I have to play it for her, Eds. It's our song."

This was an argument Richie made almost daily, and Eddie thought with a smile as he turned the toast in the pan that he and Richie and Virginia must have thousands of songs altogether by now.

Just as Richie propped his chin on Eddie's shoulder and watched the younger boy put their food on the plates Richie had stolen from his parents before he moved out for college, Virginia came into the room, still in only Eddie's soft green sweater, smiling sleepily.

"You guys made breakfast?" She asked, voice small and delicate, and they both smiled over at her.

"Yep," Richie answered. "Both of us. Definitely."

Virginia and Eddie both laughed. Richie refrained from telling them how much he loved the sound of that. "You're useless, Richie Tozier," Virginia teased, taking her seat at the head of the table.

"Useless, huh?" Richie repeated, throwing himself down in the chair to her left. "I can name one thing I do *pretty fuckin' well*."

Eddie cut him off with a cough from the kitchen. "No sex talk at the table, Trashmouth."

Richie laughed at the old nickname. "My house, too, Eds."

"I don't make the rules," Eddie said flippantly as he placed both their food in front of them and turned to get his own. Richie opened his mouth for a rebuttal, but Virginia spoke before he could.

"Thanks for the breakfast, sweetheart," She called to him. He smiled wide where she couldn't see.

"Anytime, Baby."

Virginia had made dinner (turkey and cranberry sauce and mashed potatoes and lots of vegetables the boys only pretended to eat) that night for everyone (herself and two boyfriends and their best friends and their girlfriends and even two of her own friends who had showed up only slightly late) and after, they all sat on their porch for

a while, smoking cigarettes and laughing at the top of their lungs. Eventually, it was quiet for a while, and then one of Richie's friend's girlfriends smiled over at Virginia. "So, you and Richie are together, right?"

V smiled back. "Sure right."

The girl nodded, quieted for a moment, and then gestured to Eddie with the back of her hand. "And him? Eddie, right? He lives with you guys?"

Shutting her eyes and taking a quick moment for preparation, Virginia slowly shook her head, taking a long drag from her cigarette. "No, actually, um... Eddie's my boyfriend, too."

The girl's eyes widened. Virginia had had this conversation so many times by now that it seemed boring, and this blonde's sparked interest didn't amuse her as much as it would have only a few years before. "Oh, well... Wow." She laughed. Virginia smiled back. "I'm sorry, I just didn't-

"No, it's fine," V assured her. "It's weird, I know. But, you know, it works pretty well for us, so..."

"So are the boys...?" The girl trailed off, nervously, trying not to seem too interested.

"They're together, too, yeah. We all are."

"Oh. Cool."

And Virginia pretended not to notice when she caught the girl staring at her later as Richie's hand moved to pat her on the butt during a conversation with one of his friends, or when Eddie kissed her on the top of the head as she sat in his lap in the rocking chairs outside, rocking to the beat of her favorite Strokes song. It wasn't worth noticing. Over the last five years, Virginia had learned to ignore a lot of things. Stares were the least of her worries.

Notes for the Chapter:

a short one, but a good one i think! maybe this will help with some of the confusion about the character dynamic/relationships. major plot point introduction coming next!! watch out kiddos!!!!